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Idaho Water Resource Board approves $600,000 for improvements to Priest Lake

BOISE – (May 22, 2018) - The Idaho Water Resource Board on Friday approved $600,000 for the next phase of the Priest Lake Water Management Project – the design, engineering and permitting for improvements to the outlet dam structure and replacement of the breakwater along the channel connecting Priest Lake and Upper Priest Lake.

"We want to hit the ground running after July 1st with the design and engineering phase," said Neeley Miller, senior water resource planner. The $4.8 million approved for the project by the 2018 Idaho Legislature will be available when the new State fiscal year begins July 1.

The board will contract for the work with Mott MacDonald, the consultant that completed the $300,000 Priest Lake Water Management Study in 2016-2017.

"I'm really comfortable with Mott MacDonald working on the next phase of the project. They've done an outstanding job," said Dale Van Stone of Hope, the northern Idaho representative on the Idaho Water Resource Board.

"The timing is critical here," Van Stone said. "It was important for the Board to approve these funds so we can move ahead with all of the design and engineering work in July. The summer window for field work at Priest Lake is pretty much a two-month season, July and August."

The immediate tasks will be to work on preliminary engineering, permitting, regulatory engineering and stakeholder outreach, Miller said. The Board hopes to proceed to the bidding and construction phase in 2019 and 2020.

Improvements planned for Priest Lake came as a result of limited water supplies and drought conditions in northern Idaho in 2015 and 2016, when it was difficult to keep the lake at levels required by State law while also providing enough flows in Priest River. Plans call for temporarily raising the level of Priest Lake by three to six inches in drought years and integrating real-time streamflow data into the management of dam releases to provide more flexibility.

Miller said a public meeting on the next phase of the project will be held during in the summer of 2018 to keep local residents and project partners informed.

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